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La Salle University

Volume 30 Spring, 1997

GRIMOIRE



GRIMOIRE

EDITOR'S NOTE

Time. That word—that concept—is everywhere. It even takes a second to read it.

Time is always an issue in the *Grimoire* office—deadlines, dates, times when we should schedule staff meetings. But other than immediate, present time—that of the moment—there is imagined time, which exists only in our heads and in documents like *Grimoire*.

Last September, in hope of somehow connecting with *Grimoire*'s past, I leafed through the filing cabinets in the office, pulled out faded bills, purchasing requests, old *Grimoires*. I found that *Grimoire* (a French word meaning “spell book”) was created in 1970 by a group of freshmen. I imagined the seventies in full splendor, the students with bell-bottoms and bulb-like hair, and I wondered what future students would think of us. Would we simply appear in their heads as pierced, baggy kids writing about angst, confusion, depression? Or would our art and writing speak to them beyond time and trends? We place this issue of *Grimoire* in your lap for you to decide.

To you, students of 1997, we hope you enjoy this issue of *Grimoire*, and that somehow you find a bit of yourself in it. We also offer you a glimpse of the future by inviting you to the *Grimoire* web page (<http://www.lasalle.edu/~rossj2/grimoire>).

To you, students of later years, we hope you find the same bundle of insight and wonder about us as we have found about past generations.

Kathleen Suchecki

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COVER: Photograph by Jennifer Seemuller, *Inner Struggle*

GERALD GLOVER

The Varied Garden

In a lawn not far away and closer than you think
 sits a patch of roses basking in their brash redness
 for lack of Burgundy embarrassment
 glowing with all the joy you would expect
 from so beautiful a bouquet, plucked for its
 appearance but fragile and thorny in hand
Look, But Do Not Touch the sign shouts
 yet they pluck nonetheless
 their beauty only lasts so long
 when the winter comes they all chant a song
 of mourning and glory
 we all know the story

Across from the roses yet further than you think
 rests a versatile plant array in all its
 ugliness in its defiant diversity
 they stomp on their branches but these bushes and
 trees
 stand tall and proud left alone separated
 from the ever-present crowds
 gathering to see the roses
 strike their mannequin poses
 hoping and praying to be chosen
 while the forever green garden
 attracts no attention
 receives no affection
 perhaps it is not a burden, but a blessing

KATHLEEN E. KEARNEY

Pygmalion's Demise

I have never tasted something so close
That is the distance between you and me.
I knew you in your yellow slicker
And running to class after the bell
With your tie in your hand,
But it is late afternoon
And the sun's rays are drowning
In the corner of my window
Slicing the vertical blind
In a shaft
Across the floor,
The couch,
My face.
I don't feel the heat.
And I close myself
Against your eyes.
Both empty.

We can't all be cops and robbers,
But you've become a knight
And I'll never be a damsel.
I want for you to know
That your carelessly wielded chisel
Now glances off high-shine marble
You built only as stone—
Smooth and cold.

FITZ-GERALD GALLAGHER

Undone

Whiskey, wine, beer with gin—
'tis all a spirit-flavored sin;
Yea, I am content to be undone.

But when I hang on St. Peter's hinge—
unhinged by this long screwdriven-binge,
I will repent
that I once was content
to be so unfathomably
undone . . .

SUSAN CHERNESKY

Across the Street

I WALKED OUTSIDE into the warm June night. The sky was changing in the west from dark blue to black and I could smell the sweetness of my mother's rose garden.

"Piper!" I yelled from my back porch. I wasn't sure if my cat would know his name. I remembered that my grandmother's cat, Cleo, had known her name. Maybe she hadn't. I was younger then and everything seemed true.

I walked down the wooden steps of the porch, almost tripping over my mother's gardening bucket. I yelled for my cat again and realized that it was futile. I began to walk up and down the street, looking in between the single-family houses that occupied my block. The darkness of my neighborhood made it difficult to find Piper, who was jet-black.

I walked across the street into the enormous yard of an empty brick ranch house. There was a forest of trees and shrubs in that yard, the biggest of the block.

It once belonged to the James family.

I always thought that Mr. and Mrs. James were an unusual couple. He was a good ole southern boy who loved to bake. I guess he had learned from his mother, who had worked in a bakery in Covington, Tennessee. Mrs. James was from my small town in upstate New York and the most masculine woman I'd ever met. She was tall and strong and never wore dresses. Sylvia and Frank met during the Vietnam War—they were both in the Army reserves and stationed somewhere in Alaska.

I looked throughout the bushes in the front of the James' yard for my cat. He wasn't there.

"Psssst. Psssst. Piper!" I called.

It was no use.

I decided to go around to the side of the house. I instantly remembered the first time I had ever walked into the James' yard. The image was hazy—it must have been more than fifteen years before. I was only five. My mother told me that there were nice children who wanted to play with me. She took me by the hand and we walked across the street. The sun was bright and I had to squint to see. It was summer.

That was the day I met the James children: Stephanie, Hilary, and Frankie. Stephanie was ten and had her own friends from school. Hilary was seven, but seemed to act older. She would end up being the backbone of that family. And then there was Frankie. He was my age. We would go to the same schools until senior year.

Frankie was my best friend.

I searched the left side of the ranch house, throughout the overgrown garden that used to be Mr. James' favorite hobby. As I expected, my cat wasn't there.

I was going to head back home, but the warm night felt good. It was one of the first summer nights that actually stayed warm. I walked into the backyard of the James' house and sat down on the red wooden swing they had left behind. It was a great swing, the kind that encompassed my entire body. I rocked back and forth, pushing off from the moist, long grass underneath my feet.

I looked around the yard, noticing the patch of dead grass where Mr. James' boat had sat, overturned, for years. The shed was probably empty. I remembered the time Stephanie had moved all of her belongings into that small wooden shed. She was tired of sharing a room with Hilary and decided to make the backyard storehouse into a bedroom. I think it lasted one night. Something had frightened her and she moved back inside.

I spent almost my entire childhood, it seemed, in that backyard. Whether we were playing hide-and-go-seek or whiffle-ball, the James' yard was the center of our small universe. Often, I would wake up and go right to their house. Mr. James made the best cornbread for breakfast. It all seemed perfect.



The demise of the James' happened slowly. I first began to realize something was wrong when I came home from school one day in seventh grade. I went next door to my grandmother's house and found Mrs. James crying. My grandmother told me to go home—she would be there soon. My grandmother, sober for ten years at the time, told me later that day that Mrs. James was an alcoholic. She was asking my grandmother to be her Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor.

It made sense.

I remembered once when Frankie came over on a Saturday morning when we were still in elementary school.

"My Mommy's not home," he said to my mother.

"Where is she?" she asked, probably not thinking much of it.

"I don't know."

"Where's your Daddy?"

"He's at work," Frankie said. Mr. James worked at Mercy Hospital in Radiology. He often worked all night.

"Where are your sisters?"

"Sleeping."

"Was your mommy home last night?" my mother asked, with a concerned tone.

"Yes."

"Okay, Frankie, she probably went to the store. But I'll go over with you and check," my mother said. We were a close neighborhood—parents seemed to be looking after each other's children constantly.

I waited at home with my dad for a long time that morning. My mother called at one point. When she returned, her eyes were swollen. I was asked to go upstairs. I walked half-way up the steps and then stopped to listen.

"What happened to Sylvia?" my dad asked.

"I walked over there with Frankie. We went in the front door, looked all around the house, there was no note, nothing.

I walked out back, and Sylvia's car was there. So was Sylvia," my mother said.

"What do you mean?"

"Dave, she was passed out in the back seat of her car. She must have gone down to a bar or something after the children were sleeping."

"Jesus Christ," my dad said. "What is happening over there?"

When Mrs. James' alcoholism became an open subject, that Saturday morning, which had been a confusing memory, made sense. I'm sure there had been other days like that. But as a child, I never really understood what was going on. And I never really cared. They were adult problems and we were children.

I sat on that red wooden swing in the James' backyard and thought about the question my dad asked so many years before.

What happened over there?

I guess things really started to fall apart in high school. After a few years of counseling and AA meetings with my grandmother, Mrs. James had her alcoholism under control. She also had re-enlisted herself in the Army reserves—just in time to be sent to the Middle East. It was my sophomore year and the Gulf War had begun.

The entire neighborhood was worried about Mrs. James and her family was a nervous wreck. Hilary, then a senior in high school, took over the mothering position in the family. Mr. James probably played the roles of both parents most of the time anyway. But he was working more now.

Hilary cooked and cleaned. She made sure Frankie got to school on time and ironed Mr. James' shirts for work. I spent a lot of time at the James' house during those months that Mrs. James was away. While everyone was worried about her, no one really seemed to miss her.

Especially Mr. James.

He went about his business, day in and day out. It was a curious thing. *Why didn't he miss his wife?*

I remembered Frankie and I were outside one day after school. It had snowed and we were dismissed early.

"Is it hard without your mother, Frankie?" I asked as Frankie and I walked up a snow-covered hill in the fields near our homes. We carried sleds over our shoulders. Even though Frankie and I were in high school, the snow made us feel young.

"No. Not really. Nothing has changed. I mean, we're all worried about her. She's at war for God's sake."

"But, do you miss her?"

"Of course I do," he said, making a snowball with his gloved hand. "I don't know about my father, though."

"Oh," I said, not knowing how to react. We had reached the top of the hill and were ready to sled back down.

"You first," Frankie said and I obliged. I lay on my belly, head first, and Frankie gave me a push. The snow flew in my face and I closed my eyes as I went sailing downhill.

Frankie was only a few seconds behind me. We were both laughing as our sleds collided at the foot of the hill. Suddenly, Frankie stopped laughing and stared me right in the eye.

"Kel, can I tell you something? And you won't tell anyone?"

"Sure," I said.

"I don't think my father's happy."

"Because your mother's gone?"

"No. Because she's coming back in a few weeks."

I understood. "I'm sorry, Frankie. I'm really very sorry."

Mrs. James did return—but not until the late spring of that year. That summer, Frankie and I grew apart. Hilary graduated and was getting ready for college. Stephanie was already on her own. And Frankie, well, he seemed to slip into his own world. He started hanging out with people I didn't know, a group of kids from a different high school. By the time we started school again, Frankie was almost a stranger to me.

I got off the swing and walked back around to the front of the James' house. I had given up looking for my cat. If he were

in the yard, I would have heard his bell by that point. I couldn't go home yet, though. I sat down on the front steps of the James' house and looked up to the ebony sky. I could see one of the dippers—I'm not sure which one. I was never good at that stuff. Frankie was excellent at stargazing though. I remembered looking at the stars from that very spot with his telescope. He always said he wanted to be an astronaut—he wanted to leave this world.

I remembered having lunch with my mother one day during the summer before my senior year of high school.

"Kelly, Mrs. James is moving out," my mother said to me.

"She is? I'm not surprised," I said. I had realized the James' problems. The entire family seemed to be falling apart.

"She's getting an apartment somewhere in Endicott." Endicott was bigger than our town, about fifteen minutes away.

"So, she's just leaving Frankie. He's not moving with her." I said, twirling my fork around my mashed potatoes.

"I guess not. Dad saw Mr. James while he was out in the yard yesterday. He's keeping the house for now. And Frankie's staying there."

"So, Frankie won't leave school?" I asked, though it almost didn't matter. We hadn't really talked in over a year.

"I don't think so," my mother said.

But he did.

Frankie, for some reason, transferred to the technical school in our town. He stayed only for half a year, then dropped out.

I didn't talk to Frankie my entire senior year. Through the proverbial grapevine of my neighborhood, I found out that he had left school to go into some kind of rehabilitation—for alcoholism. Maybe it was his parents' separation. Maybe it was hereditary.

The warmth of the night began to abandon me and goose bumps covered my bare arms.

It was late.

It was late and my cat was still missing. My grand search was accomplishing nothing. I got up and looked at the black and yellow *FOR SALE* sign that sat in the front yard of the James' house.

The sight was stinging.

When I had come home from college this past Easter, the sign had been planted in front of the house. Apparently, Mr. James had moved in with his girlfriend, a nurse working at the same hospital. The divorce had just been finalized.

Frankie was on his own, too. He was giving tours at the planetarium not far from our town. I guess it was the closest he'd ever get to the stars.

Five members of a family, living in five different apartments. And one home, up for sale.

I walked back over to my own house. My mother was in bed, my father was watching the *Late Show* on television. I entered the kitchen and found Piper sound asleep on a pile of newspapers. He must have come home by himself.

"Hey, Kel, lock up," my father called from the family room in our newly refinished basement.

"Sure, Dad," I said and walked into our living room to lock the front door and shut the windows. The street outside was quiet, only the crickets made noise. Almost all of the houses in my neighborhood were dark. I looked across the street and I realized that the empty brick ranch house would always be the James'.



Amada
(graphite and ink on paper)

EDUARDO A. VILLEGAS CAMPUSANO

JEFF DUNN

Appalachian Soul

My only refuge
The Southland in the Springtime
Consumes my thoughts
Until I am one with the Place
The Quiet surrounds me
In a mystical metamorphosis

The winding gentle rivers become my eyes
Trickling lightly, slightly salty
The deep brush my mind
Intertwined brambles, impenetrable thickets
The golden Sun my spirit
Though the Moon sometimes hides the hope Belief
 strives to provide
My skeleton shelter, keeping the family warm
My Family, the covered bridge, providing shelter
 for the Skeleton

I eat coal, but I spit gold
For the mountains are my heart
Lofty and steep, sometimes cold and afar
But always distinct and beautiful
Solitude confides in me It's Secret . . .
My soul is Appalachian

NICOLE CONTOSTA

Untitled

The gambler's voice scratches with a thrust
 his wiry figure posed beneath a storefront's
 green awning

"Lady, I got myself a problem—"
 he jaunts out to the hot pavement
 when I stop
 the twitch of eyes blink as he takes me in—
 maybe you could help me out.

The gambler's request, like his stance,
 another aimless, revolving search.
 I look down at my sneakers,
 damp smelly feet. Toes that stick to the soles—
 "Got myself enough problems already—"

"It broke,"
 jitters the acrobat
 his legs sliding across my belly.
 Raindrops flit in through holes from the window screen behind
 my head.
 Lou Reed wails, "I'm waiting for my man—"
 the acrobat fumbles on the floor for his stash
 he needs a dollar bill
 a light
 another connection.
 I crane my neck back to the trees
 turned upside down,
 the curve of the neighbor's roof as it
 slants; as it breaks
 in the violet, violent flash of the sky.
 "I'll get another,"
 says the acrobat as fatter drops of rain
 are pushed in
 and the music chases its peak,

the acrobat tears the wrapper open.
A golden curl dangles across his nose.

How do you know when it breaks?

“Mmm good honey.” The gambler’s squint
dilates into a shiftier grin.
He sways. His legs kick into a half spin,
sweat trickles down from his cap across his forehead
and he says something about my legs looking strong,
the power they must have to hold onto movement,
to squeeze it out,
“wrapped around his waist—”

His voice draws an even breath
a cut through the hum of car horns, tires
or the blanket of wet heat
that could hold me still,
but doesn’t.

The strength of those legs flying
over cracks on the sidewalk
dodging pedestrians
or pounding across the dulled tiles
of the diner’s linoleum floor—
slapping plates on tables
with determined defiance,

while the frustrated fat man puffs,
“They don’t know what they want, hon. You gotta tell em.
Feed their hunger. Tell em they’re beautiful,
then stuff bills in your apron and
hustle—”

“You’re a good girl, aren’t you?” The fat man challenges
as I sigh, swerve my head toward the wide stretch of windows,
the poison red of the sky fades out
the fluorescent lights from inside brighten
and the show quickens its pace—

"I am not."

I hold my shoulders upright
adrenaline surging through my limbs in
manic proportions,
clips of tunes
on how to shine and
lectures from elders on proper performance
channel through—

Yeah— yeah—

old ladies prefer Russian dressing,
their slouched-over husbands who chomp on
fat lives
incline to assume senility
while the golden boys of my generation
(who steal my heart)
seize the subtle promise,
the one that glides somewhere in the eaves
of a summer twilight—
and replace it with an aversion,
fueled by another sort of frenzied rush,
so poignant dialogues are reduced to
a numb shaking—masked by indifference—
a shrug of the shoulders
or jerk of the chin.
A forced break in the chain of lust and hope,

But the hungry, drunk black man
still dances on the corner,
plays his tune.

And the quick, blurring fix
of youth
remains intact,
even when threatened by a future of
nothing to show for the struggle,
except maybe a fistful of broken
potato chip crumbs.

KATHLEEN SUCHECKI

The False Summer

The morning begins
around forty degrees. Sun
at my desk, burning.

DENISE M. DWYER

Snowball

I 'M LYING IN BED, DRUNK, waiting for her to call. She promised me she'd call as soon as she got home from the party. That was at 11:00. It's now almost 3:00.

Sherry is my girlfriend, sort of. We have been sleeping together since September. We're both in our senior year at Olean High School and, a few days after school started, we began meeting at her house after her parents were asleep. It wasn't just sex, though. We talked sometimes about who was dating who and how long we thought they would last. Sometimes we listened to the radio and requested songs from made-up lovers and then waited in bed until the D.J. played them. (To Boo-bear, from Shmoopy, etc.) It was really the perfect set-up, actually. No real commitment, just casual sex. I wouldn't have minded a more exclusive relationship, but I settled for the sex.

I've known Sherry since I was a young kid. We grew up down the street from one another in our small, upstate New York town. I can still remember the time I cut Sherry's hair at her request. She had wanted it to look like Helen Slater's short 'do in *The Legend of Billy Jean*, but I messed up. I shaved her beautiful, flax-colored hair to the skin. When her parents freaked out, she told them she had done it herself. Sherry's like that, always helping people out.

I roll over and squint to look at the digital clock across the room. The glowing red numbers finally come into focus and read 2:55. She told me she'd call as soon as she got home. It is two days before Christmas and I want to see her before she leaves to visit her sister Elise in New York City. Elise is a buyer for some big department store there and Sherry really looks up to her. She is always copying Elise's clothes and hairstyles.

Sherry definitely looks much older and more mature than most of the other seventeen-year-old girls in our class. It doesn't really matter to me, though. I had a crush on Sherry even before she became such a fashion plate. We've been friends for so long, though, I didn't think she thought of me that way. That's why I was so surprised when she initiated a sexual relationship with me. Not that I'm not a decent-looking guy. I've had my share of pretty girlfriends, but they were all fairly meaningless—my heart has always been with Sherry.

I lift my head from the pillow and sit up in bed. It takes a minute or so for the room to stop spinning. I reach for the phone but I don't really want to call her—her parents are asleep and she doesn't have her own line—but I'm getting worried. Her ex-boyfriend, Jeff, was at the party and they seemed rather cozy when I left. Jeff is a year older than I am but he and Sherry broke things off this past summer before he left for college. He goes to the University of Virginia and, as Sherry explained to me the first night we slept together, she didn't want to waste her senior year worrying about who he was sleeping with. I thought it was a smart move. Not that I don't like Jeff. I do. He's basically a decent guy, but definitely a ladies' man. He always has been. He could always be found flirting with other girls, usually freshman cheerleaders, even when Sherry was around.

As much as I like Jeff as a guy, I was disappointed when he walked in the door to the party. He exuded a worldly confidence and he looked like he just stepped out of a J.Crew catalog. He went around slapping all of his baseball buddies on the back and hugging the cheerleaders. I was talking to Sherry in the kitchen when he came in. She cut her sentence short when she heard his booming voice call out for someone to throw him a beer. Her apologetic smile let me know our conversation was over.

While Jeff and Sherry talked enthusiastically about the past autumn, I sat a safe distance away at the kitchen table. After several shots of cheap vodka chased by warm beer, I couldn't

tell if the sickness in my stomach was from the alcohol or their body language. As they spoke, Sherry kept touching his arm and throwing her head back to laugh at just about everything he said. The saliva in my mouth accumulated with every movement she made. She seemed to be standing a little straighter than usual, too. Her tiny breasts pushed gently out from her close-fitting, gray wool turtleneck, begging to be noticed.

I sat there for almost an hour getting bombed and watching Sherry and Jeff catch up, acting like they never broke up. I mean, she technically wasn't my girlfriend or anything, but this was ridiculous. A few of the guys were playing card games at the other end of the table so I joined in a couple of times. I didn't want to look like I didn't have anything better to do than talk to her. At one point, I grabbed an unsuspecting freshman as she passed by on her way from the keg and I pulled her onto my lap. She giggled at the attention and scampered off to tell her friends, I guess. After a few more minutes, I went over to Sherry and whispered huskily in her ear that we needed to talk. Obviously embarrassed at my display of affection in front of Jeff, she blushed and pushed me into the large, walkin pantry.

"What the hell, Jaime?"

Her face was blurry. The closeness of the pantry was making me feel sick. "I, uh, just wanted to say hi," I stammered.

"Well, you're suddenly acting like a jealous boyfriend." She sounded annoyed, but I was too wasted to tell for sure.

"No, I'm really not jealous." Yes I was. "But I wish I could put my hands all over you in public like that. Wow, what a lucky guy Jeff is."

"We're just talking."

"What? Do you want to get back together with him?"

"No. But if I did, I would." She put her hand on my shoulder. "Look, Jaime. I told you before that things weren't going to be serious between you and me."

I grabbed a box of Lucky Charms from a shelf and fumbled with the lid. I needed something in my stomach.

"Jaime? Are you even listening to me?"

I shoved a handful of marshmallow and corn cereal into my mouth as I nodded.

"Jaime, I think you should go home. You're drunk."

"How am I supposed to get there? You drove." I answered with my mouth full. Crumbs fell onto my green and tan flannel shirt.

"It's only two blocks. Can't you walk?"

"I guess so. It's fucking cold out, though."

"I know, but I'm really not ready to leave . . . besides, the cold might sober you up."

"All right, fine." I put the cereal box back on the shelf without closing the lid. "Can I come over later?"

"Sure." She reached down and squeezed my hand. "I'll call you when I get home."

"Promise?"

"Yeah, sure. I promise." She leaned up and kissed me lightly by my ear. "Now go."

It's 3:07 and she still hasn't called. She has to be home. Maybe she fell asleep before she remembered her promise, I think. I look at the phone one more time and decide to walk to her house—it's less than a block away. I throw a pair of fleece pants on over my boxer shorts and nearly fall over trying to slide two sweatshirts over my still spinning head. I fumble in the dark to find the parka I dropped on the floor in my earlier stupor. My boots are by the door.

I can tell that there's a candle lit in her room by the flickering images on the ceiling. I can't make out what the images are, but there is movement in her room. Maybe she just got home. I walk around the snow-covered row of hedges alongside the house, trying to be as quiet as possible—her parents are asleep. Someone forgot to turn off the outdoor Christmas lights, and the tiny white lights sparkle against the clear, dark sky like extra stars. It looks like a Christmas card.

I stumble over something buried in the snow. I think it's a shovel but I'm still drunk so I'm not sure. I think about Sherry,

naked and warm under her comforter, unsuspecting. I will please her tonight—make her glad she's sleeping with me now.

I'm about to open the side door when I stop short. There's an extra car in the driveway. An old black and tan Ford Bronco with big tires and a makeshift ski rack. I don't need to look on the rear window to see the UVA sticker. I know it's his. I want to slash his tire with a knife, but I don't have one. Besides, then he can't leave and Sherry might get in trouble, I think. I don't want her to get in trouble. If she's grounded then I won't be able to see her either. I consider just letting the air out of one tire but it is too cold to take off my gloves. I walk back around the house, not worrying about the noise this time. I stop near her window. The movement continues. I lean down and gather up some dirty snow from the rain gutter. I carefully form an almost perfectly round snowball. I throw it at her bedroom window. I throw it hard, like I'm a catcher trying to reach the far end of left field. It hits with a loud thud. Then I run.

BRIAN SELZER

Stacie's Song

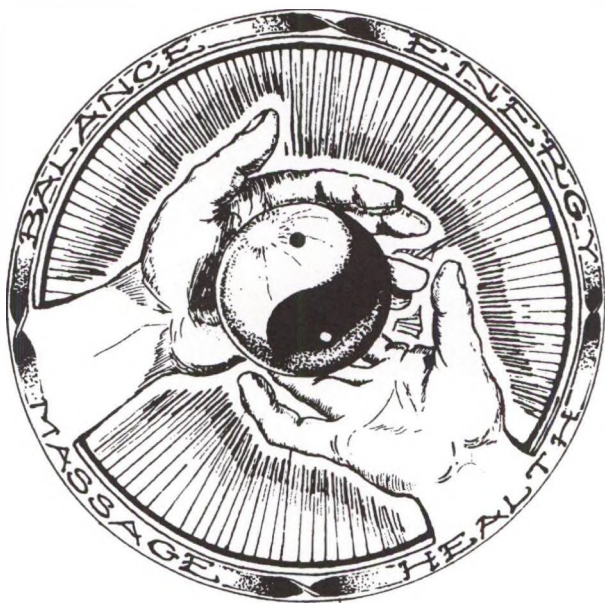
I stand there in the moonlight
a solitary figure
quiet and cold
shuddering slightly as the wind rushes past my body.
An image is called to my mind
from somewhere within
clouded by inconsistencies
but I'm sure that it is you,
though in all honesty, I can't think why.
I let the moonlight caress me,
while ocean waves lick my toes playfully
as I sink deeper into the sand,
feeling the phantasmal touch of your fingers
lightly tracing the outline of my face.

And then I see you
as the moon and stars meld together,
I see your face hidden within the night,
a riddle left to be solved,
a dream that just barely lingers.
I feel at ease, and sense calmness surrounding me.
I close my eyes and wait,
hoping that maybe I can shelter the vision a while longer;
yet I know that I cannot.
So I lock it away, deep inside
framed in gold,
encrusted with rubies and emeralds,
cherished, nourished by the desire to let it fade,
to relinquish control,
to not need anymore.

I turn and leave, my footprints the only evidence of
my presence there,
and even those are soon erased

by the ceaseless rhythm of the ocean.
A smile plays across my face, and I am no longer
alone.

The cold is kept at bay, at least for the time being,
while the warmth of your sacred memory embraces me.



Balance/Equilibrio
(graphite and ink on paper)

EDUARDO A. VILLEGAS CAMPUSANO

JIM LEWIS

Between Worlds

The actor calls upon a scene

With swagger
 he floats across the
 slight hole of camera world
 into one of his own device
 The camera's soft vapor
 Venomous, catching his every move
 Silently we watch and dream
 In the darkness of art-deco palace
 We are illuminated, but unseen
 as we watch ourselves
 Life and its imitations

Poets are silent
 even when forced
 we cannot scream
 or love, hate
 The claim to fame be our
 pad and pen
 We film the external world
 But still walk with the dreamers
 hand in hand
 We are not the characters
 we make them
 Never will our trembling eyes
 raise fear
 delight
 erotic passion

We are the voice
 of the limited
 We are an island

NADINE MERKEL

Silently

SILENTLY, I SIT as he tells me about fights and parties and girls and guns. All of these things seem to be synonymous. One always leads to another. He looks straight ahead, never at me, as he tells me about these things. His voice is flat, emotionless. But I can still tell that he feels something. What that may be, I am not sure.

He speaks of getting mugged at the age of eight, of seeing a man killed at the age of ten, of witnessing a rape, of getting beaten to within an inch of his life, of getting shot in the chest at the age of thirteen. This hits me like a lightning bolt. I think, my God, how can that be? How can it be that he was almost not sitting here with me?

I watch his mouth form the words and know that he is just talking. He is not thinking about what he is saying. To him it is just something that happened, nothing to question or think about. It was just part of life down there, he says to me. I think to myself that he has seen too much and been through too many things. He's like a veteran of some long ignored war. And scars, he has those as well. Too many for his eighteen year old body. They do not belong on him. They are the scars of an old man, a cop, anyone except him.

I stare into his eyes and wonder how many times they looked down the barrel of a gun, how many times they had known true, blood-chilling fear. I want to touch his hands, to hold them, but I can't help wondering how many times they have been handcuffed, how many times they have inflicted pain on another. I am wary of him.

I watch as he shifts in his seat and lays his head against my car door. He looks up and out the window, maybe admiring the

stars, most likely wondering how he ended up here. God knows this is a world away from where he started out.

The night starts to make its noises, ones which are so unfamiliar to him. The breeze shifts, bringing to us the smell of freshly cut grass, the sounds of crickets, summertime. Here, the darkness is blinding in its entirety. There are no cops at 3:00 a.m. There are no all-night liquor stores. There are no sirens or shots in the dark. Here, the silence is deafening. I know for him that silence is worse than all those other noises ever were.

He glances at me and says he has to go. I nod silently, knowing one day it will be true. He kisses me goodnight, sweet and slow. I wonder how many others he has kissed like that. My mind runs endlessly, thinking of all the things I know he has done, wondering why I love him so much. I feel like I should be able to help him. I want to say that I will make it all better, that I will protect him. But I feel like he is miles beyond me, so far out of my reach that he probably wouldn't hear me anyway.

He gets out and closes the door. I watch him as he pauses to look into the darkness. I know he's feeling the weight of eighteen years, of friends lost and blood shed, of all-night parties and the coming dawn, of sirens wailing and policemen shouting, of gunshots that ring and echo and have followed him throughout these years. He shakes his head and walks inside, leaving his burden in the darkness. Silently, I watch him go.

AMY VAN VESSEM

Cemetery Dance

I spin in lazy circles
My arms flung out from my body
Catching the cool breeze that blows
 through the trees
I throw my head back and laugh freely
At something you said countless weeks
 before
I can feel you smiling at me
Though my eyes do not see you
My legs bend, my arms wave, and my body twists
I can hear your echoing laughter
As I dance for you over the brittle grass
But your laughter fades and the prevailing
 silence
Halts my carefree movements in midstep
I run to you and fall upon you
Upon you in the dry dead grass
And kiss you so passionately, I am certain
Your lips feel my touch, your skin,
 my caress
From your resting place endless feet under
My brittle dance floor, wet with my tears

ALEX GROFF

Evening Trash

Like a grimy rock I lay
By the waste and the evening light,
Submerged like the Atlantis or just a murky
 plight.
And across my open chest
Creeps a maggot freshly hatched,
From a parent dropped and now to me attached.
It writhes as a lashing whip
That's been soaked in zesty mud,
Or perhaps touched by salty brine and blood.
And it snaps and cries like a loner
As it pouts to and fro,
Bellowing into my nipple the decent path to go.
But it really travels nowhere.
But just teases my puny hair,
Pushing it with its mucus as another chain to
 wear.
And then it stops its shrunken rattling
And sleeps while fetally curled,
Just as a highwayman used to the prison world.
I perhaps could flick it off
Like a deity with other cares,
But instead I let it grow and allow it timely fare.
For like my gruesome guest
I am just a stranger that fell,
And it's obvious to me the Earth has bore me
 well.

PETER THOMAS QUIRK

New York, 1996

We will connect city skyscrapers.
We have already.
It's easier when the windows are open.
Life smells more like maple syrup
Than dish detergent
When open space is around.

Imagine if you could.
Scream—
Inside the supermarket.
Relight recited lines of jumbled verse
While traveling on the escalator that lights the
register.

Quarters make the sound of trumpets when
They fall to empty coffee cups.
Beards or no beards
Life is two whispering hens
Quoting out of context.
And sunsets.
I always was a sucker for a sunset.

Car horns mix like a jazz chaperoned
Acid trip
Without all the thinking.
Apartment buildings shut lights
Off/On
Giving us the indecision of
Moonlight plugged into a
Dynamite duplex.

We are creatures craving creativity
In a place that never sleeps.

Wild dogs rip pillows in a hundred alleys.

10

Business men sip Black and Tans
In a corner bar
And talk about their wives' bras.
The city is so much like summer grass
I want to take my shoes off.

Hazy streets
Honeycombing
The homeland of a million names.
Sewer grates connecting questions on the subway.
Cabs merging with buses.
The mass of the moving molecules
Resting in the windows
Of the wavering downtown apartments.



Self-Portrait at Age 1
(graphite on paper)

MAGDALEN M. BOUFAL

KATHLEEN SUCHECKI

No Birds

IT CAME TO THE POINT that Reese didn't want to eat anymore, when the work of the jaw outweighed the pleasure of taste on the tongue. On TV he saw chicken patties, Dove bars, Doritos spliced next to car commercials and announcements still fighting the war on drugs. He knew plenty about drugs but didn't care; he it reminded him somehow of the time his grandmother had to boil the pots of water in 1983 when they lived alone in the New Woods near the fish hatchery. It was GR diasis—beaver piss in the water, he finally realized, drugs and poison.

After his mother died, his grandmother would pick him up from school, and when he got home there'd be a big iron pot of tap water on the stove. The air was heavy—Reese felt its poison in the same way he felt the dead particles of beaver urine stick to the back of his throat. Imagination, he knew they'd call it. It keeps the mind young and wandering. Now, living with his dad, imagination became less of a reflex and more like the little flame in the oven—always going out. He missed his grandmother.

"Roger," Kay spoke calmly, trying to wake Roger from his two-week-old coma. "Oh please honey don't die on me." Reese didn't know why he watched soap operas, especially this one. The characters weren't any different from the ones on other shows. "I need you like the sky needs the stars, like the mountains need the sea, etc., etc." Reese liked Kay, liked her drama and the way her eye makeup made half-moons under her eyelids. He always sat on the couch from 2:00 to 3:00 and waited for Kay to come into the scene with her magnificent eyes. "Darling, without you I cannot, no, I *will* not go on." Her eyes glittered with tears and Reese noticed that the studio lights were espe-

cially bright on this episode. He wondered if Roger was going to wake up. The phone began to ring in the kitchen and Reese got up to answer it.

"Hi honey." It was Olivia. She sounded like glass, clear and almost as if she would *ting* if he flicked his finger on her. "Listen, do you care if I come over? I don't work till three."

"Yeah," Reese answered. "Make sure you bring one of your dad's ties over for tonight."

Olivia mumbled and hung up. Reese returned the phone to its cradle and stood in the middle of the tiny kitchen. He looked up at the water stains on the ceiling and began to feel cramps in his stomach. Tonight he had a job interview at Lucky 6 down on Hester Street. Night clerk, 10 p.m.–6 a.m. He hated starting this all over again, interviews, the lousy begging over the hourly pay, the damn tie.

He thought stocking shelves at Woolworth's would have lasted at least another six months, until the checks from his grandmother's will started coming. Then he could move out of his dad's apartment and not have to pretend that he and his dad were all right. When they decided to close Woolworth's (not enough profits after Wal-Mart opened on Creek Road), Reese was stuck. *They*, Reese thought, *they were always behind it all. It's the same as all workers, all times, all places.* The *theys* that the management always referred to were the people who lived on Hester Street and in Orchard Square. *They* were always breaking into the stores, *they* were criminals and wife-beaters, car thieves, drug dealers—the people always on the front page of the Hiddleton *Daily News*. In Reese's jobs, *they* was always someone who regrettedly, unfortunately, had to do something that would cut pay or hours or benefits. All *theys* were nameless, faceless.

Olivia pounded on the door, her fist, quick, her knuckles, sharp. Reese let her in and they nudged together on the old couch.

"Ooh honey," she whined. "Why is it that you need a tie when my dad's out of town? He took the good ones and I can't

find another one." She took out a cigarette and lit it. "I can't just take his stuff when he's gone." She pretended to be more upset than she really was; the two halves of her forehead pushed together and formed a little ridge. She pulled some tinged cotton out of a pillow on the couch. "You'll be all right without one."

"You know it's just one more stupid fucking interview. Who cares?" Reese kind of wanted this job, since working as a cashier would be less physical than packing the toy section with trucks and dolls that wink and pee when laid down. "So what do you want to do?"

"Well, if you want," Olivia's voice sounded like it was wrapping itself around a strand of hair, like a coy finger, "we can go to the mall and buy a tie. I have Mira's credit card." She sounded different, more genuine. "Let's go to Reynold's. My dad gets a discount, you know." She flipped through the channels and stopped on an ad for Georgia tourism. Reese felt sick when he saw a big peach, drippy and cut open, like something from *Sickness and You* on Channel 8.

They walked around the mall. Olivia held Reese's hand tenderly and talked about her college and how all the girls in her journalism class were absolutely sure that the anchor from Channel 6 had been dropped as a regular reporter because she had gained weight. "I mean she used to be like so thin and, you know, she was on the 6 o'clock news every night and now they just hide her behind a desk and give her a few minutes for the computer update." Olivia's neck smelled like lotus oil. "It's so wrong, at least they could help her lose it." Olivia paused and squeezed his hand. "Remember she used to do all those special reports from all over, like in Bosnia? Well not anymore."

Reese looked up at the glass ceiling above the food court. Two sparrows perched on the iron eaves below the ceiling. He tried to figure out how they got in here, why they came in here.

"And then we analyzed how she wears one color for a whole week." Olivia wanted Reese to go to her college and learn about advertising and business. A while ago she told him that all his

jobs in the stores were like business and that he'd be good at it. And that he could take out loans. "College is definitely the best experience, like an adventure," she had said. "You even learn things at parties, like how to do bongos, which I know you never did." She hadn't looked at him when she said that. "I've changed so much, really, everything, right down to my Achilles heel."

At the time Reese had been mad because he thought Olivia was dying to use the word Achilles, because she probably learned it in her textbooks. Now though, he just thought she was stupid, trying to be like an encyclopedia or trying to impress him. He wasn't impressed, just sad because he didn't understand college and didn't want to understand or even think about it. For all he knew college could be like China. Reese decided that Olivia was the same person she was in high school. Except her friends were now people who studied the same things, not had the same clothes and money. He wondered why he always fit with her, because he never shared the same circumstances that she had. He took a deep breath and looked up. The birds were hopping on the iron.

"Hey, look," Reese said, pointing to the birds, one of which flew down at that moment. It landed on one of the square orange garbage cans near the fountain. "How do they get in?"

"I don't know but don't you think they should catch them and put them outside? They'll die in here."

"Hey bird." Reese slowly extended his hand and the bird flew up into the rafters again. Olivia pulled him into Reynold's, the only store in the mall with a robot wearing a tuxedo in the display window. A sign read, "Suits for past, present and future." Future was printed in future-silver.

Inside Olivia weaved through racks of sports jackets, stiff shirts. She was pretty, a graceful serpentine, cutting corners and not disturbing one piece of clothing. She stopped before a wall of ties and held up a navy one with a red R emblazoned on the tip. "This one's nice, like, classy. You could wear it with that pinstripe shirt I bought you for your birthday." She held it up to her neck. "You'd look great."

The price read \$39.95. Reese backed up and stared out into the mall. "It's a stupid interview. Christ, I wouldn't buy that tie for my funeral." He thumbed through a rack of ties designed by some artist, no, by Jerry Garcia. Ugly, ugly, ugly. He watched Olivia hold up a tie to her own white shirt in front of the mirror. *She knows I don't have money*, he thought.

As if she heard his thought, Olivia said she'd buy the tie. "You can wear it to the Christmas party at my internship." Her hair used to glitter like starlight, even in a mall. "Come on, I don't care about the money."

"I don't want the goddamn tie." Reese felt calm and certain and somehow profound. "I'll never wear it and what the hell do I need it for working at the Lucky 6?" He didn't think he was yelling but Olivia seemed to shrink away from him.

"Well, so you won't be going to the Christmas party." It was more of a statement than a question. She threw the tie on a pile of sweater vests and left. Reese stayed behind for a while watching the men look for clothes. Their faces were so serious, their choices so carefully thought out, even though everything looked the same to him. He felt his old jeans hanging on his hips and wondered how a person could always remember their clothes when wearing them. He went slowly to the car.

At home Reese still wasn't hungry even though he hadn't eaten all day. He tried running up and down the stairwell for a while, hoping to work up an appetite, but he still couldn't eat. He thought he should eat something so his stomach wouldn't growl through the interview. His dad wouldn't get home until late so Reese ate some vitamins and water and a bowl of uncooked Ramen noodles. His head dully ached, as if someone had rubbed an eraser across his brain. The echo of the TV covered his thoughts. It was 4:47. In twelve minutes he would be talking to some man about his feelings for a cash register.

His shirt was white yet he felt dirty. No tie, khakis, his suede shoes that he wore to graduation last year. Reese patted his

pockets. Wallet, keys. Sammy barked next door wanting inside the neighbor's garage. He had to leave.

"Mr. Diminski, uh, Dimitski?" The night manager was balding and had a crude face, squared and floppy like a bulldog's, just what Reese expected. He asked Reese to pronounce his last name. "Would you like a soda, or coffee, Mr. Dimitski?" He handed him an empty styrofoam cup and started mixing cream into his own coffee. "Help yourself."

"No, that's all right, no thank you." Reese set the cup on the counter, which was used as a desk by the manager. Opened envelopes, paper, used staples were all over. A bag of half eaten Chuckles were on top of a pile of papers.

"Reese is your first name, right? Like Reese's Pieces?" He laughed, but Reese was used to that joke. "So you worked at Baum's Nursery, Woolworth, Shop Rite, hey, you know Ed Kohler? The butcher down there?"

Reese shook his head. "No, sorry." He pushed his hair back from his forehead, then touched the pit of his neck where his tie was supposed to be.

"Oh that's too bad, great talker that Ed, we go to the Panthers games all the time. Great guy, great guy." The manager nodded his head and smiled.

"So how old are you, Reese?" He raised his eyebrows at the end of all his statements. There must have been about ten lines cutting across his forehead, like the layers in the shale cliffs behind the football field.

"19, sir."

"Oh, you're young. That's good." He sipped from his coffee, which was barely steaming. "Can you tell me which job you liked best and why?" His pen was poised to inhale any noise that came from Reese's mouth, like a vacuum.

"Well I guess the nursery was the best," Reese felt his voice break into little pieces, "because the hours were good and I like plants a lot. And the supermarket wasn't bad because the people were nice to work with." He smoothed the thighs of his khakis.

"And the management, any problems?" The night manager sipped out of his styrofoam cup and licked his lips.

A trap, to get me to say bad things about managers, Reese thought. *They want you to badmouth them. Makes you hard to trust.* "I just worked mostly by myself. And the managers left me alone. I was doing good work, they said."

"And why did you leave?" He seemed impatient, losing breath, waiting for mistakes.

"Well, nursery work is best in spring and summer." Reese tried to remember his boss, Ted Beans, and why he got fired. "And after summer nobody wants a garden, sir, so I just had to leave. I got laid off." Reese looked right at the night manager and didn't move. He watched him write something down, then rest his elbow on the yellow counter. Reese saw the fountain soda machine through the door behind the man. A young girl in a blue smock wiped syrup off the machine with a rag. Hot dogs wilted in a rotisserie-type thing behind her. Reese felt sad for the lonely people who came in, bought two of them and ate them in their cars before driving home, as if sitting in a parking lot surrounded by strangers and gas fumes would make eating alone less obvious and less thick in the throat.

"Mr. Dimitiski, uh, Reese." The manager tried to sound kind, and Reese felt somewhat at ease. "Tell me why you want to work here." He fingered his clipboard and smiled, honestly, Reese thought.

"Well," Reese began, half sadly, "I live right around the corner so it's not a far walk and this seems like a nice place to work. Clean and warm." Reese looked at the white walls, the metal machines. The panels in the ceiling were dirty and ready to crumble at any moment.

Suddenly someone pounded at the window behind the manager. It looked like a kid, or a couple of kids. In a second the manager bolted up and stood on the counter behind his chair, so he could see outside. He opened the window and a chill ran through the room. "You kids!" he stuck his head out the window. "I see who you are, get back here!" His large ass

was flat, unable to fully hold up his pants. Reese saw the yellowed elastic of his underwear peek over the belt. The lower rump of the manager's back hung out, two lumps of flesh, symmetrical and smooth, not quite ass. The manager tugged his pants to their previous position and got down.

"Those kids," the manager panted, and took a sip of coffee. "Always coming in here stealing, making trouble." He sipped again. "Called the cops and got them arrested two weeks ago and now they just keep causing more trouble." His eyes were tired and they drooped downward like he was always looking at the floor. "You know how to deal with those kinds of kids when they come in here? If you work here you'll see them all the time on night shift. Thieves and punks." He said "punks" with a "sh" on the end. "Punksh." It kept flitting through Reese's head.

Reese didn't answer. He didn't care if he got the job. He just wanted to go.

After the interview he sat on the curb, not wanting to go home, not wanting. The gas fumes were thick and oily in the air. He thought it might rain. The leaves in a tree across the street—*Maple?* he thought, *like in the old yard*—they rustled, as if to say that he could never touch the whole tree all at once, only branches and bark and leaves, little by little. He watched car after car fly into the lot. People hopped out and flicked gas nozzles into the hips of their cars, watched the numbers in the gas meters roll over. In a few minutes they'd get their hamburger buns, chips, donuts, cigarettes, inside the Lucky 6 and then take off down Hester Street, hungry for the interstate.

There was all noise, no silence, mostly from the highway and the generator next to the store. For a moment in all the layers of sound, Reese swore he heard the June crickets repeating over and over "No birds, no birds." He walked home carefully to the cricket-song, eyes on the trees, shoulders down, as if keeping pace for the earth.

A. RAYMOND BOSSERT, III

*A Limerick Describing a Fun Way to Induce
the Final Hangover*

Old man Ratafat had had a bad day,
Trying to escape the bottles' sway.
Then he stood up and said,
"Eat my lead till your dead!"
And proceeded to blow them away.



little bird
(ink on paper)

PATRICK RAPA

JEFF DUNN

Watermarks

Don't you wish
That people had watermarks?
To tell if they were real
Or counterfeit?
They're being mass-produced
By geniuses who make a living
Out of duplication
Why couldn't they create paintings instead?

I will give you two \$10s for a \$20
And make a \$20 profit
And you will only know the difference
In the unemployment line

KATHRYN MAC DONALD

Searching for the Gender-Bender

I never had a Barbie.
 Transformers were more my bid,
 And *Star Wars* action figures—
 I knew Princess Leia kicked ass,
 A steely Rebellion leader
 With two hotshot men
 Wrapped around her little finger.
 Purple and pink My Little Ponies I had,
 But I knew these mares could fly
 And weave magic with their forehead horns,
 Even wage war on G.I. Joe.
 The Cabbage Patch Kid I pitched
 Into the closet untouched.
 I hated dresses—
 Red jeans every day I could.

Why now do I adore flowered prints
 Swirling about my ankles or thighs?
 Why sometimes soft and sweet,
 Doe-eyed, begging him to let me
 Into his arms?
 I proposition,
 But always melt beneath
 The reassuring kiss.

Ashamed,
 I stood in a pristine white hippie dress
 And gray men's suit pants
 With the purple stain he'd just sucked above my breast,
 Watching as he knowingly fixed the tire
 On my car,
 The one I drove on the curb.
 I didn't even know what was
 The missing lock he looked for.

TOM QUINN

Agony, in the Garden

A CHUBBY YOUNG MAN in a black suit holds the thick, oak door open for me as I enter the funeral home. He smiles a fake smile, ear to ear. His black hair is short and neat, accenting his pale skin. His eyes are black coals, pressed deep into their sockets, giving him the appearance of a well-dressed snowman. He gives me a quiet greeting as I walk past him, wiping my shoes on the thick, sapphire carpet. An older man, who I guess to be the funeral director, greets me as I approach and shows me where to sign in. Judging by his face, I pin him as the doorman's father. I look down at the sign-in book and admire all of the signatures. You knew a lot of people in your life. You ought to be grateful.

The director leaves me; a young man accompanied by his father and mother just entered. I recognize him from school. They're weeping; I look at the signatures. I sign your name in the book instead of mine. Behind me, another funeral assistant is showing a group of ancient women some old black and white photographs on the wall. A horse and buggy hearse. A group of men. The exterior of an old building. I hear him say something about his father's father, blah, blah, blah. I grab a mass card. On the front is a picture of Jesus. He's dressed in a red robe, his eyes are blue and empty; staring at something behind me. Shiny, gold foil beams of light radiate from him. I flip it over.

Jonathan Kenneth Cimino.

I move over a bit so that the boy and his family can sign in. I slip the card in my pocket and check my tie in the mirror. I wasn't sure about it when I bought it. It's sort of a navy blue with some gray and white diamond shapes on it. It looks okay in this light.

Bang.

The thick, oak door is slammed shut by the wind. The sound echoes in the high corners of the ceiling. I look over to see the funeral director looking rather embarrassed. He looks around as everyone stares at him for an explanation. He forces a tight smile. He shrugs his shoulders as if it doesn't bother him and flashes a mean look over to the snowman.

I exit the lobby area and walk into the viewing room. A series of folding chairs is set up, facing front. No one is sitting down. The room is filled with people standing in clusters—talking, laughing, crying, trying to carry on normal conversations despite the dead body present. I stand there for a moment with my hands in my pockets. I take a deep breath and then start straight up the middle aisle. The carpet is the same sapphire color as the previous room's. The walls are a deep red-brown with thick, oak framing. There are antique sofas and chairs lining the walls, trying to give some sense of comfort. Curio cabinets with ancient trinkets are dispersed here and there.

I make my way up to you. Your casket lies open, your body vulnerable to the judgment of onlookers. Vulnerable to me. Baskets of flowers are stacked all around you. They seem out of place. Pink, blue, yellow, violet, white, red.

Red.

As I approach I can begin to make you out lying there. I look to see if you're still dead. You are. Just as I get there an arm grabs me and I am hugged tightly. Cheap perfume burns my nostrils. A very round, over-stuffed face kisses me hard on the cheek. My cheek feels wet.

"My baby!" the woman squeals. She's smiling widely and crying. Mascara streams down her painted cheek. I look around the room for help, but I don't know anyone. She finally lets go. I'm out of breath, I inhale deeply. The woman has curly, dark-gray hair and a very round face. She's about five foot four and nearly the same in width. She seems horribly out of place in the overcast room with her dress covered in brightly colored flowers. Pink, blue, yellow, violet, white, red.

She is squealing incessantly about how she'd hardly recognized me and about how tall a young man I've become. I've never seen her before. I look around nervously, but everyone is still gathered in their clusters talking about what a nice boy you *were*, how much you *could've* had, what a shame it *is*. No one knows what happened.

The perfumed pig is rambling on. My face is blank, I can feel it. I force a smile and nod a little at her babble. Her voice fluctuates up and down in pitch; my head begins to throb. Suddenly, another woman comes over, looking worried.

"Aunt Kathryn . . ." The new woman is a bit younger, probably in her forties. She touches Auntie on the arm and flashes a knowing look to me. "Aunt Kathryn, it's me, Jennifer."

"My baby!" Aunt Kathryn cries out to her, and strangles her with a bear hug. The younger woman smiles kindly and hugs back. The perfumed pig goes on about how she hardly recognized her and what a tall woman she's become. I leave Jennifer to fend for herself.

I go over to some of the flowers. I look through the sympathy cards attached to them. Everyone's accounted for. The football team. The hockey team. The baseball team. The girls' softball team. The honor society. Aunt so-and-so. Mr. and Mrs. so-and-so. The so-and-so family. I find mine. It looks pretty impressive, better than it did in the book. There's no name on the card, but I know it's mine. It has nearly all of the colors. Pink, blue, yellow, violet, white.

I work my way over to some pictures. There's a family photo—dad, sister, brothers, mom, and you, everyone's accounted for. Mom, and you. I study the picture and look around the room. I find your mom and dad off in a corner, talking politely to some friends or relatives. I look at the other pictures. There's one of you at about five or six and you have this gigantic football in your little hands. You're smiling obnoxiously, showing off for the camera. There's one of you at about ten or so, wrestling around with a dog on a bright green lawn. There's one

of you after the championship game last year. You're held up by a bunch of faces that I recognize from school, waving your football helmet above your head. Victory. You look just like I remember you. Hot shit. Confident.

I remember how you walked the halls with all of your friends behind you. How they awaited your every move. I remember hearing that you had seven girlfriends at one time, meanwhile, cheating on them with seven others. Asshole. I remember how all of the teachers loved you. The school hero. The good boy. God, I hated that. I remember how I wanted to be you. I hated everything you did and at the same time I wanted to be you. I would never do any of the shit you did, yet I envied what you had. How people talked about you. I hated how you would point out the cheap clothes I wore, or the way I walked funny, or the way my jokes sucked or the way I was always sitting on the bench during games. It was true. All of it. I just hated you for pointing it out.

And so I tried to do all of the things you did. You were funny, I tried to be. Everyone loved your party stories, I tried to get drunk. I got a little buzzed and peed my pants. You were good at sports, I practiced so hard. You were always calm and cool, I tried to mellow out. You died.

I walk into a side room next to the viewing room. There's about seven people, mostly kids, sitting around on giant, plush couches. I walk across the room to a coffee pot. Coffee, Christ. I pour myself some and grab a creamer. I look around the room as I stir my sugar. There are two little girls in red dresses chasing each other around. They scream and giggle. A man comes in and grabs one of them. He hunches down and whispers something angrily at her. I sip my coffee. It feels warm, a bit too hot to drink. The man leaves the room and the girls are quiet for a moment before one of them starts laughing. I watch them for as long as I can stand it, but begin to feel ill. I set my coffee down and head towards the other room. As I do, a little boy comes running up and plows into my stomach. He looks up to me for a moment without apology and then continues running.



I walk back into the living room and head up to pay my respects to you. I walk past your mom and dad. I tell them I'm sorry, but I don't stop. I walk past some sobbing relatives. I walk past some weeping women. I walk past Aunt Kathryn hugging a curio cabinet and telling it how big it has grown. I walk past some kids from school.

They're all holding each other, consoling each other. My eyes sting as I stand in front of you. I look down at you, into the dead flesh of you; the fine suit on you; you look so comfortable. I kneel, but am afraid to pray. I just look and wonder where you are right now, if you're watching me. Your skin looks powdered and fake.

Fake.

I walk out and shove past Frosty the doorman. I go to my car. I take off the suction cup *funeral* flag. I unlock my door. I slam the door tight. I stop and I breathe; my chest feels cold and tight. My breath feels as if I am sick; the air's warm in the back of my throat, like decay inside of me. I start the engine. I look in the rearview.

They don't know. I know. Red face. Red face. Red face, red
face, red face, red face, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank
space, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank space,
blank space, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank
space, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank space, blank
spacious gardens with—

—Pink flowers lined the sidewalk outside of my house. A chubby young man walked by with a dog on a thick, old leash. The dog sniffed at the front tires of my car. The man gave me a quiet greeting as I walked past him. I slid into the plush sapphire interior of the car. I started the engine; the dog barked. I drove past him and headed to the school gym. Once there, I parked the car under a floodlight and grabbed my duffel bag and towel. I walked into the gym and saw a million faces, heard a million cheers. I saw you down on the court; you waved to everyone. I watched you run around getting everyone excited

for the game, showing off. You fell. I smiled. The crowd held its breath till they knew you were okay. You knew a lot of people in your life. You ought to be grateful.

Blue uniforms dribbled and shot practice shots. The visiting team warmed up at the other end of the court. A young boy accompanied by his father and mother just entered behind me. Then, their older son came in blue uniform shorts and jersey. His father handed him a towel. He ran to join the rest of the team. The mother, father, and younger brother studied some trophies on the wall. Next to those were pictures. A few team championship photographs. The exterior of our school building. I watched as they pointed out their son and his friends in some of the pictures. I heard them tell their younger son that his big brother did this and that and blah, blah, blah. I looked back to our team. I watched you as you pranced around. Blue uniform shorts. Red sweatshirt. You take it off and reveal your jersey.

Cimino

Yellow light flooded the parking lot as I moved to my car two hours later. I slid the keys from my pocket and got in. I sat for awhile and re-thought the game. It seemed to go well from where I was sitting on the bench. Afterwards, they patted you on the back as usual. You smiled. You posed. Your parents were there, I'm sure. The school, so proud. They didn't see you stay after the game, drinking with your buddies in the parking lot. I saw you leave. I hated you. I never wanted to be you. I never wanted to be you so bad. I began driving down the dark road home and saw you walking by yourself. I watched you strutting home. A beer in one hand. I saw you stumble and fall for a second time that evening. You got up, leaving your beer can in the grass; shoving your hands in your pockets. You kept walking. The sight of you sped towards me. A blur. A red sweatshirt. A sort of navy blue baseball cap. My headlights radiated off you.

He finally continues. "You've been sitting in the car for nearly twenty minutes."

I'm out of breath, I breathe slowly. I can still feel the sick, decay feeling in the back of my throat. Someone on the radio babbles incessantly about hair replacement. I feel so out of place. I look to the snowman. In the corner of my eye I can make myself out in the rearview mirror. I turn and look to see if I'm dead.



Max, Series 1
(black India ink on paper)

MAGDALEN M. BOUFAL

JIM LEWIS

Blues for Robert Johnson
(a parable)

Rain storms over Tupelo,
Mississippi cover the trodden
Ground of holy Earth where a delta pharaoh
Once traversed in search of freedom
For he was no christ-child,
surviving the
massacre of
the innocents.

And so,
He heard of the Devil's approach and
candid arrival
And the Devil offered him the great powers of
whiskey and wimmen for his poor soul
and it came—

For the negroes who screamed in the fields
that summer's morn in apathy
To the King Sun that no longer shines
upon the mythical spot once known as
The crossroads—

To his soul
From a slave to the Devil's
tool;
Robert J. died a black sunday

Lord have mercy.

A. RAYMOND BOSSERT, III

Ode Against an Urn

Ignore the cut diamonds,
 Ignore the huge pearls,
 Ignore the etchings of naked girls,
 This here vase is good for one thing
 To smash and to break
 And crack and unmake,
 To drop from a skyscraper,
 Or rub with sandpaper,
 To use as a spittoon,
 by a buffoon
 Who's already smashed up a Mingh.
 Coz inside this here vase
 A little demon with claws
 (Or with a red face,
 if you call it a vase)
 Is zapping your mind with babbling junk,
 All kinds of psychic infomercial bunk
 "Drink till your drunk,
 Sail till your sunk,
 Lay down with dogs till you smell like a skunk,
 and itch with fleas.
 I'll be ready to please."
 But you'll drop to your knees,
 Once you catch the disease.
 And then into the vase you go,
 Trapped with nowhere to go,
 While the evil little bat-winged fella,
 Flies free from the jug singing, "Oh, wella!"
 So take this dagger and take this Cross,
 Pick up the vase and give it a toss
 And when it smashes on the ground
 Run through the little split-hooved hellhound.
 And forget the cut diamonds,
 And forget the white pearls,

And certainly forget the naked girls.
For this here vase was made for one thing,
To smash and to break you,
To crack and unmake you,
And snare you with sin's mortal sting.

BRIAN SELZER

Cloud Watching

shadowed, moving across
 fleetingly, as if time held no meaning.
 A speck, coexisting across the world
 without further thought.
 liquid intelligence on top of us all,
 all seeing all knowing,
 watching from a distance.

a single sound uttered, fantastically beautiful
 wonderous-acquiescent
 the sound that draws and binds together
 all of us at once
 lost, forgotten
 meaningless at best;
 still it flies,
 watching seeing hearing.
 seeing hearing.
 hearing.
 watching.

But does it know
 Does it have its own intelligence?
 Maybe if it did,
 would human error apply?
 And if it is as human as we are,
 are our casuistic
 approaches to logic and morals
 the same?

I can't help wondering . . .

Contributors

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